

# European Newsletter 1 • 2004

ICEVI EUROPE

**International Newsletter**

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**Dear colleagues, dear  
friends,**

it is my pleasure to inform you about an important event in Europe, the **ICEVI European Conference 2005 to be held at Chemnitz, 14. – 18. August.**

The theme of the conference is

**EDUCATION - AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE**

We are expecting more than 500 participants for that important event, experts, working in the field of visual impairment.

This information will be followed soon by a formal "call for papers" which will be posted to all recipients of the European newsletter, all members of ICEVI Europe, all European institutions for visually impaired people, whose addresses are known. To make it simpler and faster for interested colleagues it may be useful, to spread the upcoming informations via e-mail. So please help us simplify the procedure and if you are interested in the conference, please let us know your e-mail-address. To inform us just send an e-mail to the following address: [e.fuchs@vbs-gs.de](mailto:e.fuchs@vbs-gs.de) and you will be kept very well informed about all the steps ICEVI Europe is taking in the next months and years.

Würzburg, 19.02.2004

Eberhard Fuchs  
Chairman ICEVI

## Vocational Training section under the umbrella of the ICEVI?

On the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2003 the first (mini) conference of upholstery teachers took place. Representatives from training centres from Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and The Netherlands came together to discuss how they could best join forces and what advantages this would give.

In Finland and The Netherlands the visually impaired have for many years been able to qualify for a vocational training that is especially suited to the individual handicap. Due to this a large number of individuals has been able to increase their chances on the employment market. However, not all vocational training that is suitable for the Dutch or Finnish visually impaired is suitable for the employment market for the visually impaired from other countries.

### **High unemployment amongst the visually impaired after the fall of communism**

After the fall of communism many visually handicapped people became unemployed. These people wanted to earn their own income and continue to be respected members of the community. A lot of these people made enquiries about this to, amongst others, Sonneheerdt in The Netherlands. This prompted Sonneheerdt to decide to share it's knowledge in the areas of Vocational Training and Employment Arbitration with others, especially in the Middle- and Eastern- European regions.

### **No future without a proper vocational training**

After some investigation it was concluded that just a small number of the people who have become unemployed can be helped in finding work. Employment requires some form of expertise on the part of the employee. A proper vocational training is necessary to successfully participate in the employment process, especially in countries with a high rate of unemployment.

In Lithuania and Estonia a start has been made in training young people who otherwise would not have the opportunity to participate in a regular training scheme and who, without extra training, would otherwise be doomed to spend the rest of their lives being dependent on friends and family.

In other words, they would spend the rest of their lives as outsiders.

### **Upholstering**

The profession of upholsterer demands craftsmanship. It is not something you 'just do', even for people with good eyesight. To become a craftsman, a few years study in the theory and practice of upholstering is needed.

Giving the visually handicapped such a training allows them to be able to obtain work from an employer on the open employment market, or to be self-employed, or working in a more protected work environment.

With co-operation from the Ministry of Education, the vocational training 'Upholstering' has been added to the syllabus in schools for the visually handicapped in Vilnius, Lithuania and Tartu, Estonia.

From Holland, Sonneheerdt has made it's knowledge available. The teacher from Vilnius has been given a training and assistance has also been given with equipping the classrooms and with obtaining the correct course material.

Now, three years later, the first candidates have found a place in the employment market.

In Tartu a professional upholstery teacher was already present. Beforehand, he had followed a vocational training for a number of years at the Arla Institute in Finland. He was able to manage with the most simple things and was able to share his knowledge with others.

Sonneheerdt also made it's expertise available here and provided the means to purchase better materials and tools, and assisted in redecorating another instruction area and turning it into a reasonably useable classroom.

### **Harmonisation/co-operation with the Arla Institute**

Certain things have been harmonised with the Arla Institute because their local knowledge is better. They know more about the local employment opportunities. They are able to decide which areas they aim for when acquiring employment opportunities.

For instance, the number of candidates that establish themselves in Holland as self-employed is much smaller than in Finland. Discussions take place about the level of training and the methods of examination and qualifying.

Discussions and harmonisation also took place about what they and we do concerning additional matters like preparation for entry into the employment market. Is attention being paid to social skills? Are the employment arbitrators being given extra schooling? The placement of individuals with a visual handicap is different than the placement of normally-sighted individuals. The representatives from Finland were in agreement. They want to hold regular conferences for professionals and to work together to increase the professionalism of their vocational training.

The changes that happened to the upholstery training can also apply to other vocational trainings. Sonneheerdt is also exchanging information about IT (Information Technology) vocational training with as goal the acquisition of employment.

Vocational training is fine, but the job and an income for one's own are the rewards for the many years invested in study. Vocational training coupled with employment arbitration is extremely successful in achieving this.

#### **Under the umbrella of the ICEVI**

Without doubt a lot of improvement can be

made as regards knowledge sharing in the area of vocational training. This is not only relevant when starting-up a new training in an already established school, but is also vital when providing support for each other. An example of this is the co-operation between the Arla Institute and Sonneheerdt and between the schools in Vilnius and Tartu. Please let the editorial team know if you require information about this new Vocational Training section ICEVI.

For information about Sonneheerdt please visit our web-site at:  
[www.sonneheerdt.nl](http://www.sonneheerdt.nl).

Teijo Venema

## **Celebrating 25 Years of Early Intervention in Barcelona**

When we began Early Intervention with visually impaired babies 25 years ago, in Barcelona, Spain, we were an enthusiastic team who had decided to change the future of this population. At this time the percentage of psychosis we found was very high. Starting working with families and newborn children in Hospital, specially applying the Neonatal Behavioural Assessment Scale (NBAS) to show parents the capabilities of their child, the future began to change.

During all of these years, directed care for infants with blindness or low vision has been provided during the first year of life in their own homes or in our Centre, always depending on the needs of the child and family. Such care includes monitoring development in view of the blind or low vision baby's needs and capabilities. This programme of multi-sensorial stimulation is based mainly on an inventory and reinforcement of the baby's abilities. Visual stimulation for low vision children or specific techniques for blind children are always provided as well.

Another area on which we focus our attention is the family. Understanding and guiding parents in the process of assuming the loss of the healthy child they were hoping for, their adaptation to reality, their recovery of their role as parents as well as family dynamics. In our services, parents are given the opportunity to meet with others with similar problems in groups whose objective is to help their relationship with their children and the inter-family relationship affected by one of its members being diagnosed with a chronic condition. We also arrange meetings of affected children's siblings from time to time..

Our model of work has expanded to the whole of Spain. We follow enthusiastically our task adapting it every day to new problems, new models of families, new resources. Now, we have two new Projects:

1. A better understanding and a better support of Children with Visual Cortical Impairments,
2. To attend mothers and parents during the pregnancy when a visual impairment is identified in the fetus. (Since last year we have been working with some parents in these circumstances).

This year we celebrate our 25 years of Early Intervention. By this reason, on the 4th of December of 2003 we celebrated a Forum specially dedicated to Visual Cortical Disabilities. It was a big success. Then we would like to share with all the dear members of ICEVI this special year and our joy and happiness.

Merce Leonhardt  
Psychologist. Coordinator Early Intervention.  
Joan Amades Centre.ONCE. Barcelona, Spain

Happy Parents and child



## Polish – German Conference 2003.12.05 – 12.06. Katowice, Poland Topic: “Early intervention and vocational training of blind and multidisabled visually impaired people” (MDVI people).

The conference was organised by the Local Foundation of Help for the Blind in Chorzów, with the co-operation of Blindeninstitutsstiftung in Wurzburg and also Berufsbildungswerk in Chemnitz. Ms. Birgit Kuchta, the Programme Officer of Eastern Europe in Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) in Germany, was our special guest.

The Conference was organised under the patronage of the following people: the Chairperson of the Health Committee of Sejm of the Republic of Poland, the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship, the President of the town of Chorzów and the President of the city of Katowice.

Prof. Jan Malicki opened the Conference by reading aloud a poem of the Nobel prize winner – Wisława Szymborska, entitled “Kindness of the Blind”. The poem starts with the words: “A poet reads poems to the blind. He did not know that it is so difficult. His voice is trembling. His hands are shaking. He feels that every word is here to undergo the trial of darkness...”. I must admit that we felt a little bit like that poet. However, in spite the fact that our voice was trembling and that our hands were shaking, we wanted our colleagues to know that the issue of early intervention needs interdisciplinary attitude and comprehensive therapeutic and diagnostic solutions. That is why we had invited to our Conference doctors, educators, psychologists, rehabilitation specialists (altogether there were 135 people who participated in the Conference from 51 various institutions).

Among participants, there were specialists from hospitals, early intervention clinics, integration nursery schools, education and care centres, psychological and pedagogical guidance services, rehabilitation centres and Activity Therapy Workshops from Poland. Dr Hans Neugebauer, the director of Blindeninstitutsstiftung in Wurzburg and Eberhard Fuchs, the Chairman of ICEVI were present. Dr H. Neugebauer talked about the long-term co-operation (since 1991) of the Institute and Foundation in the field of creating comprehensive systems of therapy for blind and multiple disabled visually impaired people inhabiting the Silesian region. E. Fuchs presented different forms of organising early intervention in the countries of Europe.

We were also happy to have Dr Grazyna Walczak from the Special Pedagogical Academy in Warszawa, who delivered a lecture during the Conference. Norbert Galla, the Chairperson of the Foundation, described the Foundation’s work in the Silesian Region – in the field of early home intervention, education and therapy (since 1997), as well as vocational training of people with additional disabilities (since 2000).

The theme of the first day of the Conference was **Early Intervention**.

Many issues, including the following, were stressed in presentations:

- the need for early diagnosis and the help from the moment of the diagnosis;
- the right medical and functional diagnosis of the vision of babies;
- making of diagnosis through interdisciplinary team of specialists in the child’s natural environment (because of the age of the child and type of disability);
- intervention that should provide for the future perspectives of parents and families;
- parents should be present during their child’s therapy, stating at the same time the limits of therapeutic intervention in their house;
- the whole family has the right to be given proper psychological care during the child’s therapy;
- the child’s and his parents’ problems should be treated interdisciplinary;
- the basis of the child’s therapy is creating the developmental environments for children according to their needs and possibilities;
- the medical knowledge concerning the child’s neurological development and the vision process is important to understand that functional vision may improve through stimulation and rehabilitation;
- vocational training is essential for all specialists in early intervention.

### I Know Where I Am

Children born blind draw the world as they experience it.

Elke Zollitsch

As dark night draws in.  
How my hands long to hold you.  
Star in distant skies!

Side by side, blind and sighted children drawing: using a sharp pointed pen upon a sheet of plastic the blind child finishes one tactile picture after another – spontaneous insights for ‘eye-people’ into the world of the child born blind – images of the world we share, as the blind child has ‘grasped it’, has touched, smelt, heard and sensed it. Reflecting on each of the 70 drawings, the author has written three line ‘Haiku’ poems, symbioticechoes of what each child visualises and has to tell in the lines of the pictures. Additional commentary offers the reader insight into the fascinating creative process. See the world anew through the eyes of children born blind.

Format 30x30, 162 pages [www.blinde-zeichnen.de](http://www.blinde-zeichnen.de)

The experience presented by the Foundation's specialists indicated that the interdisciplinary cooperation of specialists is possible and parents and specialists can work together. Moreover the mutual responsibility for the process of therapy in the home environment enables children to find their place in society and function properly.

**The theme of the second day of the Conference was Vocational Training.**

Our friend and partner, Director Karsten Hohler, described specializations of the vocational training in Chemnitz. We focused on the presentation of training and the future development of specializations of the vocational training in Special Education and Care Centres in Owizska and in Chorzów. Because of the changing situation in Poland, Protected Works need to adjust to the open market. It is necessary to create new and fashionable types of and it is very important to provide the young with proper psychological education, which helps them to

function in a vocational group. Activity Therapy Workshops give employment, social rehabilitation, integration for people who cannot find a job either in Protected Works or in Vocational Activization Works.

At the end of the Conference, the creation of a Polish Association of educators, psychologists, therapists and rehabilitation specialists working with blind and visually impaired people was discussed. Although our voice is trembling and our hands are shaking and it is so difficult (the author's note), perhaps it is easier to realize those tasks when we are together.

KRYSTYNA GWIZDON

Psychologist

Manager of Early Intervention Centre

**Secretary of the Local Foundation of Help for the Blind**

ICEVI Contact Person from Poland

## Working in Africa

For about 10 years, Monteclair Institute, a Center for Visually Impaired people, located in Angers, has had a partnership with the National Institute for Blind people of Mali, in Bamako. This twinning has enabled us to contribute to education and the supply of medical equipment and also to setting up an optical center for partially sighted children and more widely for partially sighted people of the city. It has also enabled to set up some construction projects .

In 2000 we set up a Braille transcription center. The Dutch NGO "Force Fondation", which is mainly focused on the setting up of Braille libraries in developing countries, contacted Monteclair Institute. Force Foundation had worked for several years in the English speaking countries of Africa and Asia, and was looking for a partner to continue this action in the French speaking countries of West and Central Africa. Therefore, Monteclair Institute's knowledge made this link possible.

Since 2000, Monteclair Institute, with the FISAF, (Federation for the Integration of deaf and blind people in France), has trained African people for Braille transcription and has set up some small transcription centers in Bamako (Mali), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Rabat (Maroc), Tunis (Tunisia), Yaoundé (Cameroun) and others projects are under consideration in Rwanda, Guinée, Togo, Sénégal...

This cooperation works in the following way: on the one hand, the countries, where these Braille centers will be located, are chosen (according to former relations with them) by 'Foundation Force', in association with the Blind French Union; on the other

hand, the FISAF and Monteclair Institute are in charge of the organization of voluntary trainers' recruitment and equipment purchase (two computers, two Braille printers and so on). Then the trainers spend two weeks in the country where the Braille center will be located and later on they spend one week there. A computer technician is also recruited for setting up the equipment which has been bought in France. In this way in just a few months, a transcription center is set up and therefore enables Blind people to use Braille documents.

After the start-up of these centers, the relations still exist and this action continues with some other exchanges. This is how a better active relation between France, the Netherlands and Africa has been consolidated, but this action is not enough. Indeed, in these countries, the Blind organizations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa have very few resources. The specialised teachers and the rehabilitation workers do not benefit from a specific training, no other training centers are in place in these areas and therefore we have decided, with all the organizations which can join us, to think about the support we can provide for them in order to enable local training centers to be set up; as a consequence all the professionals who are working with Blind or partially sighted people would be qualified. This could be a good common project for the institutions and Services, members of ICEVI.

Francis GUYTEAU

Monteclair Institute' Manager and FISAF 'General Secretary .

## The cooperation between SOSW Chorzow and SFZ Chemnitz



Nearly two years ago a successful partnership between the SOSW Chorzow and SFZ Chemnitz started. Since then projects of cooperation developed in different areas between both institutions. Their target is, to give people with visual impairments (totally blind and low vision) the opportunity to participate at highest level in professional, social and cultural life through very good education and rehabilitation.

### Subjects

Especially in the area of metal processing employees of the two institutions exchange ideas and knowledge. The trainer of the SOSW Chorzow stayed in Chemnitz for some weeks for a practical course. An CNC machine was donated to Chorzow in June 2003. This improves the education of students to become more professional. Also in other areas of professional training experiences were exchanged.

In future further support shall be given especially in the field of training of trainers and teachers. In this context a number of employees of the Polish institution will take part in a project for vision therapy. Vision therapy is an important aspect of rehabilitation to reduce the impact of low vision.

Vision therapy, the art and practice to make someone use the remaining sight for the execution of tasks, needs to be provided as a service from early childhood to every level of education and needs to be offered at any stage of life. It is an international newly recognized practice, which gains more and more acceptance in all countries of the world.

This is why it was decided to start offering low vision services at SOSW Chorzow. All trainees who are enrolled at this center should get access to appropriate services. Furthermore these services should be made available for persons with visual problems coming from other schools and rehabilitative institutes in Chorzow and also for the general public.

Before designing a detailed implementation plan it is important to conduct a needs assessment.

Service provision should include:

1. individual low vision assessments
2. advice and counseling services
3. optical and non optical devices
4. the training in the use of vision with and without devices
5. early intervention services
6. visual orientation and mobility
7. professional advice
8. the support of persons with additional impairments to make them utilize their sight efficiently
9. the creation of awareness in the community
10. an effective networking systems with other professionals.

### Free time

Body perception and social skills are the most important elements of educating adolescents with visual impairments. (This is the reason why), sport is an important aspect of rehabilitation. In 2004 the SOSW Chorzow will organize a sports festival with participation of the BBW Chemnitz. and in the same year a holiday camp with Chemnitz' trainees in Poland will also take place.

## School development project under the framework of Socrates – Comenius I

Some time ago friends from Athens, Greece, parents of multidisabled visually impaired youngsters, asked for urgent support in the education of their children. After having discussed this wish in different forums, such as the European Union and ICEVI Europe, a group of interested people coming from different countries found themselves coming together to launch a common project, not only for the sake of improving the situation in Greece, but also to create a common level of knowledge which would prepare staff members of the different institutions to meet the needs of multidisabled youngsters.

This project was presented to the European Un-

ion and was accepted and Epikinonea, Athens (Greece), La Pepiniere, Lille, (France), Bartimeus, Doorn, (The Netherlands), Odilieninstitut, Graz (Austria), Graf-zu-Bentheim-Schule, Würzburg (Germany) have started on the planning.

The project aims are to:

- collect ideas concerning the special individual need of MDVI children and youngsters
- formulate the special help which should be given by educators and teachers
- develop a plan of professional development (curriculum)

## New establishment of SFZ Germany: Vision Center at the Vocational Training Center in Chemnitz

In June 2003 a new department of the Vocational Training Center (BBW Chemnitz GmbH) was opened. It was named Vision Center referring to its aim to maximize vision for specific tasks in persons with low vision. Through this new aspect of innovation a wide range of low vision services shall be offered to enrolled students and also made available to the community outside the institute.

An interdisciplinary team of professionals consisting of two psychologists, an ophthalmologist, an optometrist, an orthoptist, social workers and rehabilitation teachers join together to provide comprehensive services.

These include:

- ❖ medical diagnosis and eye care,
- ❖ refractive services,
- ❖ explanation and advice on diagnosis, connected symptoms and prognosis,
- ❖ comprehensive low vision assessment (clinical, functional, optical and educational),
- ❖ fitting and provision of optical and non optical low vision devices,
- ❖ visual training,
- ❖ psychological advice and support,
- ❖ advice in social economic aspects and requirements,
- ❖ demonstration of electronic devices,
- ❖ collaboration with other relevant professionals outside the institute and internationally,

- ❖ offer information and advice to persons working with the visually impaired e.g. teachers, trainers and tutors,
- ❖ creating awareness in the community.

In addition there is the possibility to receive additional training in blind techniques like Braille, Orientation and Mobility and training in Daily Living Skills.

For students with substantial needs the training is offered as a complete one-year course, otherwise it is conducted in conjunction to the professional training.

After assessment an individual training program is designed according to the requirements and abilities of a person. This includes specific goals and periods of evaluation, which depend on the personality, the age, the diagnosis, the educational background, additional impairments and the motivation of the person. Hereby it is important to include persons of close relationship to the individual and other personnel working with him/her. In this respect all services are provided individually to train a person with visual impairment to life as independent as possible in the society of the sighted.

Author:

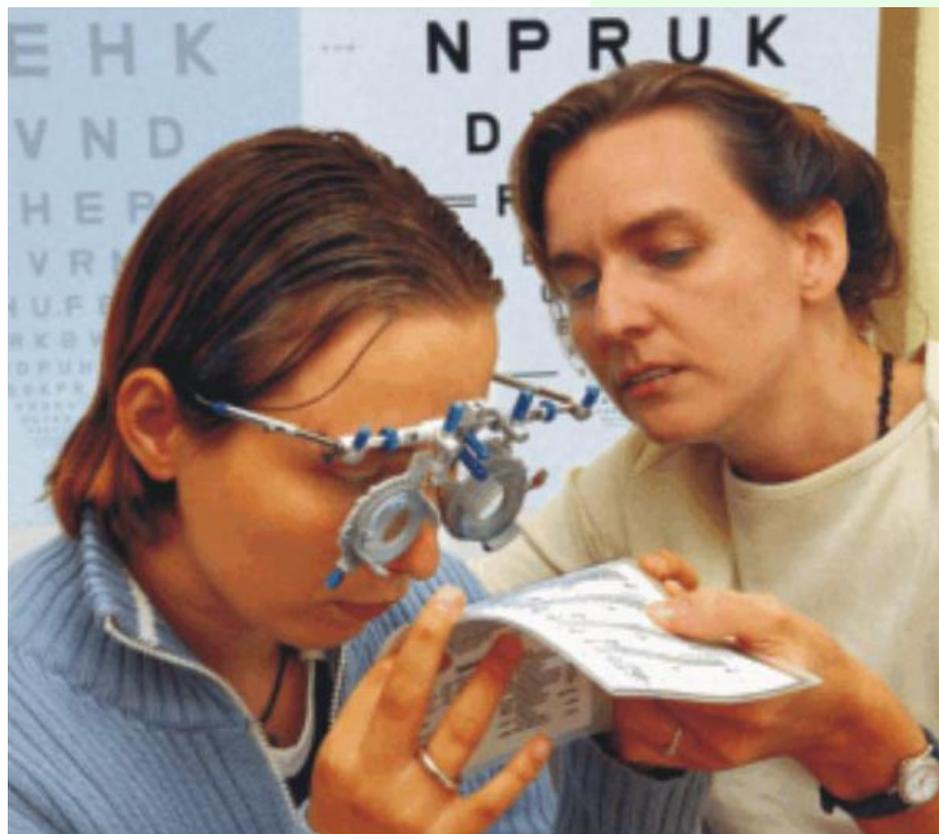
Petra Verweyen, Orthoptist/Vision Therapist;  
August 20003

Assessment of a student to establish the need of magnification while reading

These aims will be achieved by staff-exchange and children mobility within the five participating institutions. The project is called "PATE", it is based on a common understanding and all hope to benefit from this program for the sake of multidisabled visually impaired children, youngsters and adults.

Würzburg, 19.02.2004

(Eberhard Fuchs)  
Comenius I Coordinator



## TACTUS

Tactus is the European award for tactile picture books for blind and partially-sighted children. The organisation was set up in 2000 under the European 'Culture 2000' programme and is also supported by the French Cultural Ministry. Current members are Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and the UK.

### WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE TACTUS ORGANISATION?

The aim of the Tactus organisation is the promotion of tactile picture books for visually-impaired children. Activities fall under four headings:

Co-operation: Most tactile book producers work in isolation. The sharing of ideas, techniques, problems and solutions benefits us all.

Research: An important strand of our activity is research into the theory behind tactile illustrations for children. Re-thinking the basis of tactile representation for children could result in more accessible and meaningful illustrations.

Production: The development of improved production methods should enable people to produce tactile pictures more quickly and efficiently.

Distribution: We aim to explore and exploit all means of getting tactile books into the hands of blind children where and when they need them.

### HOW DOES TACTUS OPERATE?

Any EEC country can join the Tactus organisation, either as a full member or as an associate member. For further information on membership please contact the Secretary (see below).

The Tactus competition takes place every autumn. The competition is publicised in every member country and entries are forwarded to Dijon by mid-October. At the end of November a panel of judges (half of them visually-impaired) meets to choose the winning book for two age groups: under-7s and 7-12 year-olds. The following day, the awards are presented by a famous children's author or illustrator in an official ceremony at the international Montreuil Children's Book Fair in Paris.

The winning books are subsequently produced in various European languages at the Les Doigts Qui Rêvent workshop in Dijon. The books are then sold at a heavily-subsidised price in the member countries.

Through the Tactus Award and by participating in International Book Fairs, Tactus hopes to encourage more people to design and make tactile books, and to challenge professional authors, designers and illustrators to create books suitable for young visually-impaired children. In this way we hope to increase the quality and quantity of tactile books available.

A few weeks after the competition a poster is produced showing all the competition entries. This poster is sent to all entrants in the competition as well as being widely distributed for publicity purposes. The poster is important as a tribute to the many individuals throughout Europe who give so generously of their time, energy and resources to produce wonderful books for children with little or no sight.

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